



United States Department of State

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

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Domestic Refugee Resettlement: Visit to Cleveland and Pittsburgh

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

I recently visited two American cities where refugees are resettled, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, and met with many people who have a stake in the success of the U.S. refugee program. I met refugees who have been resettled in America, staff of the local agencies that helped to resettle them, and others such as municipal and school officials, employers and community leaders.

Cleveland

Cleveland has a history of immigration from Eastern Europe, so refugees were welcomed from Hungary in 1956 and from the Balkan wars of the 1990s. More recently, Cleveland has become the new home for refugees like Steven Bombo Tabane, who is one of the “Lost Boys” of Sudan. Separated from his family at age 7 and on the run from war, he spent the next twenty years on his own. He moved from one refugee camp to another, eventually learned French, and worked as the head of security at UNHCR in a section of a camp in Ghana. It was only recently, after being resettled in Cleveland and starting a job at the Plastic Platters Company, that he discovered his mother is still alive and residing in Juba, South Sudan. His principal concern was for his mother’s poor health; despite not having seen her in twenty years, he still feels a great responsibility to help her.

Three agencies resettle refugees in Cleveland:

- [International Services Center](#), an affiliate of the U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants ([USCRI](#))
- [Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services](#), working with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops ([USCCB](#))
- [US Together](#), an affiliate of Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society ([HIAS](#))

Our meetings with the resettlement agencies, stakeholders, and refugees were held in the downtown offices of the International Services Center. I was impressed that they run a for-profit interpretation service, and use the proceeds to offset costs related to refugee resettlement. Newly resettled refugees

are given 35 hours of classes a week to help them adjust to life in America and are introduced to representatives from organizations that deliver services to residents – such as the police and the American Red Cross.

Catholic Charities and US Together are resettling refugees with great success in the nearby suburb of Lakewood. I was particularly pleased to meet Sal Garaci of National Safety Apparel. His company had hired 35 refugees and wanted to hire more. He explained that safety garments need to be sewn with great care by workers experienced in sewing and needle work. Refugees have excelled in these jobs.

Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh was once a haven for immigrants, but suffered a steep decline in its population after the steel mills closed in the 1970s. In recent years, it has experienced a renaissance, reinventing itself as a city of “Eds and Meds” – hosting leading universities like the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University and a world-class medical center. Many of the foreign-born living in Pittsburgh today are Ph.D.s affiliated with the research universities. Refugees resettled in Pittsburgh are also playing a part in revitalizing and diversifying the city.



Two recently resettled women from Bhutan and their cousin who is employed by the Jewish Family and Children's Services, with Assistant Secretary Richard

City Council Member Natalia Rudiak invited me to speak at a City Council meeting along with others to explain the refugee resettlement program and Pittsburgh’s part in it. Rudiak’s mother was born in Poland, and she remembered learning English with her mother by watching *Sesame Street* together. Today, her neighborhood of Carrick welcomes refugees from Bhutan. Council Member Bill Peduto also identified with the refugees, telling me that he is descended from Italian immigrants to Pittsburgh. Also on hand was the Allegheny County Executive, Rich Fitzgerald, who spoke about refugees being part of Pittsburgh’s rejuvenation.

In Pittsburgh, the group of refugees I met resembled the pie chart of nationalities being resettled there: mostly Bhutanese, smaller numbers of Iraqis, a woman from Uzbekistan, and two brothers from Pakistan. In Pittsburgh, about 400 refugees per year are resettled by three local agencies: [Jewish Family and Children's Services](#) (HIAS affiliate), [Catholic Charities](#) (USCCB affiliate), and [Northern Area Multiservice Center](#) (USCRI affiliate). Pittsburgh also is home to over 400 “secondary migrant” Bhutanese who moved there from other American cities after relatives encouraged them.

Once again, the chief concern on the minds of refugees was family members still living in precarious situations overseas. The Hameed brothers from Pakistan had fled after their Muslim neighbors attacked and killed members of their Christian family. They had been resettled to Pittsburgh from Bangkok, Thailand, but had left a sister-in-law and her child behind. An Iraqi woman with a background in science is now an Arabic teacher in America. She loves teaching, and is thrilled that her family is thriving in

Pittsburgh. But her mother and other relatives had fled Iraq to Damascus, Syria. With violence now raging in Syria, she fears her relatives will be caught in the cross-fire.

On my last morning in Pittsburgh, I spoke to members of the World Affairs Council. The event was co-sponsored by [Vibrant Pittsburgh](#), a group that promotes economic development and diversity. I was amazed at the cross-section of citizens who had a real interest in refugee issues. Henry Reese told me about starting the [City of Asylum](#) program that hosts refugee writers. His colleague Silvia Duarte encouraged me to read the publication [Sampsonia Way](#), featuring the work of exiled writers. Sister Maria Kruszewski gave me a copy of a DVD that explains and celebrates the contributions that immigrants make to our society. Leaders of a Somali Bantu group introduced themselves. Several immigration attorneys were in attendance. One of the lawyers had been resettled as a refugee in the United States from the Soviet Union under the Lautenberg Amendment, legislation that facilitates the admission of Jews and other historically persecuted religious minorities as refugees into the United States from Iran and the former Soviet Union. She was there with her school-aged daughter.



Assistant Secretary Richard and County Executive Rich Fitzgerald

(photo courtesy of Emily Farah/
Essential Public Radio)

I came away convinced that the only way the U.S. refugee admissions program works is as a public-private partnership, with a great deal of involvement from local supporters. Local support is strong in Cleveland and Pittsburgh, but gaps still exist in the program. Cleveland Dentist Hayat Ali told me how nearly every refugee she treats needs dental work. Very few refugees, however, are covered by dental insurance. Several people also told me about the need for interpreters to help those refugees who do not speak English to communicate with doctors, school officials and others. School officials in Cleveland told me how the No Child Left Behind Act did not exempt the test scores of recently-arrived refugee students from school statistics, which they feared was pulling down overall results for the schools. In both cities, limited bus service can prevent refugees from reaching English classes or jobs.

Despite these problems, when I asked refugees if their resettlement in America was worth all the challenges they had experienced, their unanimous response was a loud and clear "Yes!" Whether fleeing war, religious intolerance, or ethnic strife, the refugees I met strongly believe that coming to America has given them a rare and precious chance to live freely and in peace.

Best regards,

Anne C. Richard
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Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration



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